



File Code: 1950/2850

Date: August 9, 2007

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County Commissioners
215 South 4th Street #A
Hamilton, Montana 59840

AUG 09 2007

Ravalli County Commissioners

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Dear Commissioners:

During the Lost Horse Quarry public hearing held on Monday July 23, 2007, it appeared that some of the proposed quarry issues were not fully understood by the public and commission. Additionally, testimony and the resultant discussions indicated clarification of some aspects of the proposed project might be beneficial in the Commissions consideration of the project. The purpose of this letter is to provide additional information and clarify a few of the issues discussed.

The Lost Horse Mine Plan of Operations and Reclamation Plan (Plan) submitted to the US Forest Service (FS) by the Ravalli County Road and Bridge Department is a draft document. The draft Plan will be revised and a final Plan produced if the project proceeds. How the Forest Service proceeds from here depends on a response from the County as to whether or not they wish to go forward with the proposal. The FS withheld submitting comments on the Plan to the County with the intention of incorporating public comments and concerns into the FS comments. Many of the public concerns voiced at the hearing could be addressed and specified in the final Plan. The bullets below provide a few examples:

- The time of the year, hours of operation and total number of operational weeks per year can be stipulated (i.e., spring break, special events, and holidays) and adjusted beyond what was originally submitted to reflect public comment.
- Time of haulage along Lost Horse road could be dictated so that it does not coincide with school bus travel schedule.
- Signage on Lost Horse Road and Highway 93 could be required which would partially address safety concerns.
- Climber egress/ingress to the climbing area could be addressed. We would work with the climbers to minimize down time for climbers in the area.
- As described below, if the project is implemented and reclamation completed, the resulting site will provide improved parking conditions for recreationists and will be visually and environmentally improved over current conditions.

Please consider the following aspects, which are provided in an effort to clarify project misconceptions and assist the commission in making a fully informed decision:

- The quarry mineral material is high quality material available in an existing quarry, which by regulation is a source of free material for the County. Working as a partner with the County, material will be made available to the Forest Service at no development cost to



the Forest. If the County does not develop it for its use, it can be developed for FS or other use in the future.

- The proposed project does not include the rock faces utilized by the rock climbing community. Consequently, the recreation site will not be lost. Many people spoke to the loss of the area for recreation year round and including the wilderness. Work at the quarry site will have little if any affect on recreation in the Lost Horse Canyon. Concerns over recreational conflicts have, to a large degree, been mitigated through adjusting the timing of operations. Proposed operations will have no effect on wilderness.
- Peregrine falcons, sheep and badgers have not been identified occupying the site by FS wildlife biologists. The site and the work proposed has been reviewed by our Wildlife Biologist and it has been determined that the proposed work will have no effect on those species mentioned. The high level of recreational use in the canyon has a far greater effect on local wildlife populations.
- The final contour and size of the "pit" will be less than 4.9 acres. This is something we can stipulate in the operating plan to ensure limits are not exceeded. We have specified the material to be removed and when that is reached operations will cease, it does not matter if it takes 5years or 10, once the specified material is removed operations will end.
- The final reclaimed area will significantly improve the current site conditions. The existing "debris" piles will be removed, a parking area will be designed and constructed, the remaining area will be reclaimed and vegetated, weeds will be addressed and best management practices (dust, erosion controls, etc.) will be implemented pre- and post-operation.
- During the life of the project, the County will maintain the Lost Horse Quarry road, which will improve the condition of the road.

The FS appreciates the County's need for this high quality material and believes use of this material is in the public interest and would benefit the County's residents and visitors. We believe that a final Plan can address public concerns, provide reasonable protection of other resources, and improve the existing condition of the site.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the proposed project further, please do not hesitate to contact me at 406.821.4244.

Sincerely yours,


Chuck Oliver
District Ranger

cc: Judy Reese